DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 305 496 CE 052 234

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TITLE Labor Market Information and Career Decision Making. ERIC Digest No. 83.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, Ohio.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-CE-89-83
PUB DATE 89
CONTRACT RI88062005
NOTE 3p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Choice; Career Education; Career Guidance; Computer Networks; Decision Making; Delivery Systems; Demography; *Employment Patterns; Guides; *Information Networks; Information Seeking; *Labor Market; *Occupational Information
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Labor market information (LMI) describes the interaction between occupations and employers. Three major components make up LMI: economic or labor force information, occupational information, and demographic information. Various agencies, including federal departments and state employment security agencies, compile LMI. A guide to the information is the network of the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee and the State Occupational Information Coordinating Committees. The three most common types of LMI classification (and the major federal publications that use them) are by occupation (Dictionary of Occupational Titles, Standard Occupational Classification Manual, and Guide for Occupational Exploration), by industry (Standard Industrial Classification Manual), and by instructional program (A Classification of Instructional Programs). Criteria to assess the quality of sources of LMI include reliability, comprehensiveness, timeliness, and credibility of the developer. Resources to help teachers and counselors make better use of LMI in career decision making include "A Training Handbook for Using Labor Market Information in Career Exploration and Decision Making: A Resource Guide," "Career Information in the Classroom: Workshop Guide for Infusing the Occupational Outlook Handbook," and "Improved Career Decision Making through the Use of Labor Market Information Trainer's Guide." (YLB)

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LABOR MARKET INFORMATION AND CAREER DECISION MAKING

Accurate information about occupational opportunities is one of the essential ingredients of sound career decision making. Teachers and counselors both play an influential role in helping youth and adults gather, analyze, and use this information. One important source of occupational information is the labor market. Following a definition of labor market information (LMI), this **ERIC Digest** highlights some sources of LMI, describes major LMI classification systems, suggests some criteria for selecting LMI, and lists sources for career decision making.

What Is Labor Market Information?

The labor market is the interaction of individuals competing for jobs (occupations) and employers (industries) competing for workers, usually in a particular geographic area. Although for some occupations there is a national labor market, for most the applicable labor market area is local. Because it is affected by both economic and human factors, any labor market is in a constant state of flux (Kimmel-Boyle and Wheldon 1986).

Labor market information (LMI) is the description of the interaction between occupations and employers. It is information that describes and interprets how a labor market is functioning, and identifies available labor resources and employment opportunities. Three major components make up LMI: economic or labor force information (the number of people employed and unemployed), occupational information (descriptions of occupations), and demographic information (characteristics of the general population related to employment and workers) (Iowa Occupational Information Coordinating Committee 1985). Although more and better LMI will not in itself solve career decision-making problems of youth and adults, it is important to understand how to use it in career decision making.

Sources of Labor Market Information

Labor market information is compiled by a variety of agencies, among them divisions of the U.S. Department of Labor; the Departments of Commerce, Defense, and Education; and state employment security agencies. One guide through this maze of information is the network of the National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC) and the State Occupational Information Coordinating Committees (SOICCs). This network supports the development of statewide Career Information Delivery Systems (CIDS) that are now available in 47 states. The Association of Computer-Based Systems for Career Information in Eugene, Oregon, publishes a directory of state-based CIDS (McKinlay 1988).

Increasingly microcomputer based, CIDS help match the interests, abilities, educational goals, and experience of users at all levels with compatible job/career possibilities. They generally provide national and state information (and local when possible) on occupations, education and training programs, and apprenticeships. Greater flexibility and access are becoming possible as technology advances; innovative audiovisual enhancements and the increased storage capacity of compact disks are improving the information base and the delivery system.

LMI Classification Systems

Using LMI effectively requires understanding how the information is organized. Following are the three most common types of classification and the major federal publications that use them (NOICC 1986):

- **By occupation—**
  - **--Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT)** contains detailed definitions of occupations, including titles, description of tasks performed, and related occupations. Because the most recent edition was published in 1977 (supplemented in 1982), some information is dated, for example, sex stereotyping in job titles and required ability levels.
  - **--Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) Manual** categorizes all occupations in the DOT, focusing primarily on titles and descriptions of occupational groups.
  - **--Guide for Occupational Exploration (GOE)** contains an overview of 12 broad occupational interest areas, including specific questions counselors are likely to ask.
- **By industry—**
  - **--Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) Manual** categorizes and describes industries. The numerical SIC codes are also used to tabulate data on industries and to access many databases of industrial information, such as the Thomas and Standard and Poor's Registers.
- **By instructional program—**
  - **--A Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP)** describes elementary through postsecondary programs in 31 areas, subdivided into 50 categories. The CIP includes coded classifications and definitions of program purpose.

The NOICC (1986) **Resource Guide** contains detailed descriptions of these and other related resources.

CE058234

ERIC is sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education

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To provide links between these various systems, cross-references or crosswalks were created. NOICC supports the National Crosswalk Service Center, a computerized database that cross-references the DOT, SOC, GOE, CIP, 1980 Census indexes of industries and occupations, and the Occupational Employment Statistics Program, which provides industry profiles and data on numbers of workers employed, using SOC codes.

Selecting Labor Market Information

Because of the amount and diversity of LMI, selecting the most appropriate sources may seem like an overwhelming task. The following criteria can be used to assess the quality of sources of LMI (Rosenthal and Pilot 1988).

- **Reliability.** Does the information seem to describe accurately the outlook for the occupation? Some materials, developed for recruiting or publicity purposes, may overstate the demand for an occupation, future earnings potential, and so forth. Materials produced for the purpose of vocational guidance usually are the most objective.
- **Comprehensiveness.** Does the source provide a variety of information about a broad range of occupations? The CIDS, described earlier, are examples of comprehensive sources of LMI.
- **Timeliness.** Does the source provide up-to-date information? Regardless of how comprehensive and reliable a source was when it was initially published, if the underlying facts or data become dated, it may then contain obsolete or misleading information.
- **Credibility of the Developer.** How reputable is the organization or individual that has developed the material? Some organizations, such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Division of Occupational Outlook, have earned a reputation for developing reliable materials. However, there are also organizations with vested interests that tend to develop self-serving materials.

Using Labor Market Information in Career Decision Making

LMI can be useful at any point: before a career choice is made, during a job search, or when contemplating a career change. A number of resources have been developed to help teachers and counselors make better use of LMI in career decision making. Brief descriptions of three are provided here.

1. *A Training Handbook for Using Labor Market Information in Career Exploration and Decision Making: A Resource Guide* (Lawson and Blair 1986) is designed to serve as a training manual to help counselor educators use NOICC's (1986) *Resource Guide*. It contains step-by-step procedures for designing and implementing a workshop based on that source and includes handouts and transparency masters as well as information about specific workshop activities.
2. *Career Information in the Classroom: Workshop Guide for Infusing the Occupational Outlook Handbook* (OOH) (Kimmel-Boyle and Wheldon 1986) contains an instructor's manual and seven modules that will help teachers learn the concepts needed to understand the information in the OOH and infuse these concepts in career education. The modules cover such topics as basic principles of career development, developing infused activities, understanding the labor market and the economy, and exploring careers. Sample handouts and workshop outlines are also included.
3. *Improved Career Decision Making through the Use of Labor Market Information (ICDM) Trainer's Guide* (1984) is intended for use in training counselors who are involved with their clients' career decision-making processes. A primary objective of the curriculum is to familiarize participants with LMI resources and help them develop ways to use these resources with their clients.

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This ERIC Digest was developed in 1989 by Susan Imel and Sandra Kerka, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under Contract No. RI88062005. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.